

1669/5004

THE
MINISTRY
OF

RECONCILIATION

TWO SERMONS,

PREACHED

AT LONDON, SEPTEMBER 27. AND 30. 1792.

BY ROBERT SHIRRA, JUNIOR.

K E L S O :

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR, BY J. PALMER.

1793

Rev. Mr. Lawson with letters
from his friends & brother
Michael Shivers

THE whole of the following discourses was originally intended to have been delivered in one Sermon, immediately after the ordination of the Rev. Alexander Easton, in London. But on account of the length of the previous services of that day, they could not with propriety be delivered as was designed. The first two heads were therefore delivered that day, and the remainder on the Sabbath evening following.



1609/5004.

TO THE
ASSOCIATE CONGREGATION
OF
YETHOLM.

BRETHREN,

AS an expression of that gratitude which I owe for the regard which you shew me when discharging the duties of my office among you; and as a testimony of that respect which I have for you in the different stations in which Providence hath placed you, as men, as Christians, and as office-bearers in the house of God, I beg leave to inscribe to you the following Sermons.

That they and all my other ministrations may prove the happy means of making you and all who have access to them, more acquainted with the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the New Testament Church; and with the blessed effects which the doctrines of

110

(iv)

the Ministry of Reconciliation, when delivered
in their purity, and accompanied with divine
influence, never fail to produce, shall be the
sincere wish and earnest prayer

of

Brethren,

Your most humble servant,

ROBERT SHIRRA, JUN.



THE MINISTRY

O. F.

RECONCILIATION.

SERMON I.

2 COR. V. 18.

—God—hath hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.

THE light of nature, assisted by a few bright strokes of traditionary truth, hath, by the unwearied assiduity of some of those who have enjoyed its feeble rays, made such eminent improvements in knowledge of different kinds, that it hath excited the astonishment of all succeeding ages. But far as this dim light, with all its boasted acquisitions, hath reached, it will still, we must confess, be found to come infinitely short of that degree of knowledge which the Gospel reveals; and will, at the very mentioning of it, sink into obscurity, and have its "honour laid in the dust." Though it speaks of a time, when mankind were favoured with the visits of the gods, and with abundance of uni-

B

versal

versal love, peace, and joy; though it speaks of the entrance of moral evil, and the vast devastations which it hath produced in the world at large; though it speaks of some method of deliverance from it, and its consequent misery, which never as yet had, but which might, at some future period, be devised, and made known to the inhabitants of the earth; and though it speaks of a happiness attainable by mankind, equal, in every respect, if not superior, to that which they have lost by the introduction of this evil into the world, and altogether commensurate to their most sanguine wishes; yet it always speaks of these things as vague traditions and uncertain conjectures; and, after all its astonishing efforts, leaves its disfigured votaries to wander in the dark shades of ignorance and error. But what these distinguished followers of this uncertain guide, in our benighted gentile world, could never explore or obtain, that the revelation which God hath given man from above, for directing him how to glorify him, and how to procure the lasting happiness of his nature, hath clearly unfolded. It hath made known to mankind in general, in the clearest and completest manner, not the doctrines themselves only, but the very interesting nature of them; all things connected with them; and a thousand other important circumstances, that never could have been descried by this obscure and erring medium.

We are led to these pleasing and comforting reflections by the reading of the verses where our context and text lie. They present us with



a short and compendious view of those precious truths, and exhibit them before our eyes in a very narrow compass. Some of them are, indeed, more obscurely set before us; others of them more clearly; but all of them, still, in a truly striking, comprehensive, and forcible manner. *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given unto us the ministry of reconciliation.*

IN these verses, the new creation is expressly mentioned, which naturally and unavoidably leads us back to the first creation of all things, which was, in the beginning, accomplished by God in a way very good; and a reconciliation between God and man, and man and God, which, in like manner, leads back to that famous period, celebrated so much, and so long, in the song of the poet, and dream of the philosopher, under the title of the golden age, when peace, friendship, love, and happiness subsisted between the inhabitants of heaven and earth. The entrance of sin, and of its desolating effects, is plainly intimated, when we are informed, that all things by it had become old; that they needed to be renewed; that mankind, though originally created by God holy and happy, had by it become at variance with him, enemies to him, rebels, warriors, and enmity itself against him; that they needed to be reconciled to him by Jesus Christ; and that God needed to give to his Apostles, and other com-

missioned servants in every age, for this purpose, the ministry of reconciliation. The manner in which deliverance from sin, and its dreadful consequences, is effectuated, is implicitly suggested, when we are taught, that by union with Christ we become new creatures; that this amazing revolution is, in every thing, effected by God, who reconciles us to himself by Jesus Christ; and that God hath given to his chosen servants this ministry of reconciliation. A happiness, in every respect, equal to that which we lost by Adam's introduction of sin into this lower world, and altogether adequate to the urgent necessities of our guilty souls, is clearly intimated, when we are told, that we are created anew to God; that sin and misery pass away; that all things become new; that God becomes reconciled to man, and man to God; and that universal peace, love, joy, and happiness, in proportion to our renovation of nature, and reconciliation to God, every where abound, and fill our hearts and habitations. But of those things here darkly hinted at only, we have, throughout our Bibles, more clear, distinct, copious, and full account almost every where laid before us.

THESE words which I have, at this time, chosen, as the text, afford three branches of discourse; every one of which demands our particular attention, and will, upon this occasion, furnish us with something of very suitable matter of instruction and entertainment.

I. The nature of the office of the Pastor of the Church in New Testament times. It is, a *Ministry*. II.

II. The particular designation of this office.
The Ministry of Reconciliation.

III. The manner in which it, in all the different periods of the New Testament dispensation, is handed down from one generation of his ministering servants to another. *God gives to them the Ministry of Reconciliation.*

THIS Ministry, then, mentioned in the text, which, first, comes under our review, according to the order laid before us in it, must no doubt mean the whole of that painful, though pleasant work, assigned by Christ in his word to the teachers of his Church. *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*.* Admitting this, as a general description of this ministry, the fulfilment of it may be comprehended under these four important branches, which are just so many essential duties of every pastor of the New Testament Church, in discharging his honourable office. The feeding of the flock of God with the whole of divine truth contained in his word, so far as he hath opportunity; the dispensing of all the ordinances of his instituted worship with purity and entireness; the governing of that part of the Church committed to his care with fidelity and prudence; and

* 2 Cor. iv. 1. 2.

the administering of her whole discipline with candor and meekness, to all who, within his jurisdiction, have incurred it.

THE exercise of this MINISTRY consists, first, in the feeding of the flock of God with the whole of divine truth contained in his word, so far as the minister of Christ hath opportunity. The Christian system lays before us, a rich, beautiful, and pleasing variety of interesting truths. Some of them are, indeed, more important, and others of them less so. Yet all of them, whether deemed by us more or less important, like the greater or smaller stones of a building, being equally necessary in their place, for glorifying God, and saving sinners, must, of course, be made known to the hearers; and, according to their magnitude and importance, be inculcated upon them. Those which are more important, ought to be laid before them with greater attention, preached to them with greater frequency, inculcated upon them with greater fervency; while these that are less important, however trivial by the hearers they may be accounted, or however much they may be the object of their aversion, must, nevertheless, if plainly contained in the Bible, be by no means neglected in the ministration of his servants. For, as they are all the plain doctrines of the same revelation of God, he saw it meet and necessary that mankind should be acquainted with every one of them, which must, in itself strictly speaking, be both important and interesting; and should make them the grand rule of their faith and practice. *Thou shalt speak my words unto them,*

is the commission given all his watchmen in Zion, *whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious**. Thou son of man, *shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house†.*

All this, the faithful ambassador of Christ, in fulfilling that ministry received from the Lord, will, both in public and private, during the whole course of his life, attempt with the most sedulous and unremitting attention. Sometimes he will do it by reading the word of God; sometimes, by expounding it; sometimes, by preaching; sometimes, by catechising; and, at other times, by ministerial visitation from house to house. Of such conduct, the whole life of the celebrated Apostle of the Gentiles after conversion, and particularly when ministering in the famous church of Ephesus, affords a very conspicuous example. *Ye know*, says he, *in his last address to them, from the first day that I came*

* Ezek. ii. 7. † Ezek. xliii, 10, 11, 12.

into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befel me, by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*.

* Acts xx. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32.

THIS Ministry consists, secondly, in the dispensing of all the ordinances of divine worship with purity and entireness. The discharge of this part of the work of the Ministry is by far too little attended to by the generality of the ministering servants of Christ. Nay, considering the many awful threatenings in Scripture annexed to transgressions of this kind, it is not perhaps ever so strictly exemplified in the conduct of any of them, as could be wished, or even expected. For, under the first dispensation of divine grace, the man, whoever he was, that did not, in every circumstance, act according to the Scriptural mode of instituted worship, was, by the express command of Heaven, doomed to die in the most public and ignominious manner: and often the awful sentence of death, severe as it may appear to us, was in the very act of his unwarranted presumption executed upon him in that way which seemed most meet to Jehovah himself; intimating to all future generations the greatness of the divine displeasure for deviating from his sacred institutions; and setting forth the transgressor as a signal monument of the terrible vengeance of Heaven for daring to alter or innovate the service he himself had prescribed. Now this dispensation, lasting as it was, we must allow, is past. It hath given way to a second that is much more mild and happy. It "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear," hath made room for one that is an "easy yoke, and a light burden." Nor does God now under this dispensation, in ordinary cases, pursue such rigorous measures with the transgressors of his law. Yet he assures us, he ob-

G

serves

serves every neglect of any part of his appointed worship, every deviation from the form of his prescribed ordinances, and every innovation introduced into his solemn and religious institutions; he marks all these wanderings down in the book of his remembrance; and he tells us, that persons guilty of such transgressions shall not escape his righteous indignation and judgement, both here, and hereafter. *For I testify,* says he, *to every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book*.*

Deeply impressed with the truth of these sentiments, the conscientious steward of the mysteries of God will, with earnestness, endeavour, in this respect, to perform his whole duty to his great master. He will not only aim at declaring to his hearers the whole counsel of God without exception, but also at dispensing all the other ordinances of divine grace in their proper seasons, whether they be prayer, praise, fasting, thanksgiving, vowing, covenanting, baptizing, celebrating the Lord's supper, or blessing the people: at dispensing these ordinances, in every circumstance according to the laws of Christ, avoiding, on any account whatever, either to mix his own inventions with them, or to shorten them in any form: at dispensing those which

* Rev. xxii, 18, 19.

belong to saints, to all who by their external conduct evidence themselves to be such; and those which belong to sinners, to them who by their outward behaviour prove themselves to be so. For he remembers, that this, as well as every other branch of the ministerial work, unimportant soever as it may be reckoned by many of his professed ministers, who little attend to this Scriptural mode of performing it, is just a part of that trust committed to him; and that for the right management of it he must, in due time, be accountable to Jesus his Lord and Judge. *Go ye*, says he to all his ministering servants, as well as to his Apostles, *and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen*.*

THIS Ministry consists, thirdly, in Christ's commissioned servants governing, with fidelity and prudence, that part of the Church entrusted to them. That there is a real form of government by which the interests, welfare, and happiness of the Church are to be promoted; that this form of government devised and revealed by God, with this design, is the presbyterian; that the great outlines of it are distinctly marked out by him; and that every thing necessary for a firm and lasting establishment of it is suggested: These are doctrines plainly taught in the word of God. The fifteenth chapter of the

* Matth. xxviii. 19, 20.

Acts of the Apostles, besides many other express passages of Scripture, evidently displays them before our eyes*. So clearly, in fact, are they in these places presented to our view, that there is not a person who reads his Bible without prepossession, not a person who reads it with real attention, and a sincere desire to learn from it the will of God in these matters, but must find them written in legible characters. Hence, the present beautiful system of presbyterian government, manifestly dictated by our Bibles, and exhibited in the incomparable standards of the Church of Scotland, was, in the most glorious period of the reformation of these happy lands, compiled by our pious forefathers; and adopted by all ranks there, as the sum of their principles, and the confession of their faith. Hence, our venerable ancestors established this presbyterian system, as the alone ecclesiastical government in these highly favoured islands; and ordained, that neither clergyman nor layman should be admitted to the communion of the Church without his assenting to the form of government as Scriptural, as clearly taught in the Bible, and as the sum of his religious principles upon this very head. Adhering, though but for a short time only, to this glorious system, these Churches were then raised to a distinguished eminence among the famous Churches of the reformation, and “looked forth as the morning, clear as the moon, fair as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.” Yet this

* See the Rev. Mr Muir’s excellent Sermon, preached at the opening of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, entitled, *The Synod of Jerusalem.*

divine system, blessed be God, is, in our day, though a period of one hundred and fifty years distant, still the established religion of the Church of Scotland : And this same happy system, however obscured in the practice of the generality both of her ministers and members, still continues, making an allowance for those innumerable frailties which are inseparable from all human societies as well as individuals, to shine forth among different dissenting bodies in these our native lands with all its primitive splendour and glory. Of this system, has our young brother, this day, in the sight of every one of you, made the most open and avowed profession. Of it, does every one of you in your station, at your admission to communion with this still celebrated Church amongst us, make such an explicit, though indeed less public, avowal. Much then should all such persons who live in her communion, but especially all such who minister in her in holy things, if they would possess common integrity and a good conscience, be well grounded in the knowledge of it ; fully persuaded of its importance, as well as truth ; live always in the firm faith of it ; act, at all times, corresponding to this belief in their daily practice ; adhere to it, when those who are disaffected to the cause of religion, or indifferent to this grand concern, are giving up with it ; and even contend for it, when the liberties of God's house are either invaded or encroached on by the wicked governors of this world. *Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts : and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness*
and

*and fear *. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God;—holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake †.*

The exercise of this part of the ministerial work will not only require the greatest degree of diligence and firmness, but it will expose the ministering servants of Christ, in the conscientious discharge of it, to many hardships, and often to severe persecutions. For as long as they sustain the characters of governours in the house of God, they must, as far as possible, prevent the existence of factions and factious members in her; must, upon a right foundation, advance her peace and happiness in every form; must, when called to it, examine persons desirous of being admitted to her communion, and observe that, before their admission to it, they be duly qualified in point of knowledge, religious principles, and blameless conversation; must appoint the different seasons in which her members ought to assemble for the various exercises of religious worship; must preside in and direct the solemn service of our holy religion in her public assemblies; must examine persons elected by the Church to be public teachers and other office-bearers within her bounds, and see that,

* 1 Peter iii. 15.

† Titus i. 7, 9, 10, 11.

previous to their investiture with these offices, they be duly qualified for performing the employments to which they are called; must ordain persons so chosen and fitted for discharging the different offices of deacons, ruling and teaching elders amongst her members; and must ascertain, from the Bible, what are the doctrines to be taught in her, what worship dispensed, what government established, and what discipline administered. *Who then are those faithful and wise stewards, that with fortitude and perseverance in such things, perform their whole duty? Blessed are those servants whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make them rulers over all that he hath. But and if those servants say in their hearts, Our Lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the men-servants, and the maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken: The Lord of those servants will come in a day when they look not for him, and at an hour when they are not aware, and will cut them asunder, and will appoint them their portion with the unbelievers*.*

THIS Ministry consists, fourthly, in administering, with impartiality and candour, the whole discipline of the Church to all those who have incurred it. The word of divine revelation presents many express commands for the administration of the discipline of the Church. Not only does it inform us in general terms that it must be administered according to her various

* Luke xii. 42, 43, 44, 45, 46.

necessities,

necessities, but it lays before us that very discipline which shall be most edifying and advantageous to her members. Obstinate offenders of any kind or degree must, on the one hand, be excommunicated or suspended from her fellowship, until they give satisfactory evidence of their real penitence; while desponding penitents, on the other, as soon as they give satisfactory proof of their genuine repentance, must be restored to her bosom. The former of these parts of the ministerial work is as necessary as the latter; and the latter, as the former. Both, indeed, in their place are indispensibly requisite for promoting the grand concerns of the Church; and therefore must be put into execution. *If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*.*

In the inflicting and relaxing of this discipline, however, the office-bearers of the house of God must be careful how they act. They are enjoined to "warn them that are unruly;" and to reprove, admonish, and rebuke with all au-

* Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17, 18.

thority; to "withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly;" and to exclude these, who are obstinately impenitent, from the fellowship of the Church, by passing sentence of excommunication upon them. They are ordered, to shew offenders the sinfulness and danger of their irregular conduct, as well as the offence given the Church by it; to solve every objection which may be made by them against submitting to her discipline; to lay before them the advantage of living in her communion; to deal with them in every possible method that they may be brought back to her fellowship. They are commanded to bring offenders to a state of peace with her; to cultivate a disposition for it among all who are already in her communion; to relax every censure formerly inflicted upon these who appear sufficiently penitent; and even to restore them to her fellowship; but they are to do all these things "with all long-suffering and doctrine," and with "the meekness and gentleness of Jesus." *The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will* *. *I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality* †.

* 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25, 26.

† 1 Tim. v. 21.

SUCH, ye faithful ministers of the reconciliation, is the nature of your work ; and so laborious and arduous are your constant employments. Hail, ye happy ones, ye servants of the Lord of Hosts, men greatly beloved. “ Ye “ are highly favoured, the Lord is with you : “ blessed are ye among mankind.” This office with which ye are invested, is honourable ; and these duties of it, though often toilsome, and irksome to the flesh, are attended with the most grateful and happy consequences to your souls. To you we are indebted for the clear manifestation of the glorious privileges which the Church enjoys ; and from you we expect diligence and resolution in the performance of the various duties of your office. Go forward, then, in the path of the divine commandments, calling, on every occasion, to remembrance your duty ; and discharging your engagements. Go forward, ye ministers of God’s house, adhering, with punctuality and steadiness, to all the laws of your Master and King ; “ bearing your “ reproach ;” and through “ evil report and “ good report, finishing your ministry.” Reflect often on the noble encouragement presented to you in the Gospel for animating you in his ways ; and be assured, that “ in due season you shall “ reap, if you faint not.” *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer : behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried ; and ye shall have tribulation ten days : be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life *.* For, says Paul, *I am now ready to*

* Rev. ii. 10.

be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing*.

Having shewn you wherein this Ministry consists, let us, in the

II. Place, proceed to the particular designation of this office: *The Ministry of Reconciliation.*

HERE let us enquire, why these different parts of the work of the minister of Christ, mentioned last head, constituting the whole of his pastoral duty, are designed the Ministry of Reconciliation. This enquiry, with its answer, will compose the sum of what we mean to say on this branch of our subject. In answer to this important question, we observe,

IN the first place, that they may be so called, because they make known God's eternal purpose of reconciling sinners to himself. So early as Jehovah himself had a being, or as eternity itself existed, he intended the manifestation of his grace and mercy to Adam's unworthy and miserable race; and "his thoughts" to his forlorn family were "thoughts of peace, and not "of evil, to give them an expected end." Then,

* 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

he thought upon them in their low estate. He purposed to obtain redemption for them. He proposed, in the eternal council, the amazing scheme for redeeming sinners. He contrived this wonderful device in all its astonishing circumstances. He devised the important means for accomplishing it. He engaged to effectuate the whole work necessary for bringing it about. He undertook to carry it on from its early commencement to its future consummation through eternity. Such, indeed, in their nature and excellence; and so vast, in their number and variety, were these his eternal designs of grace and mercy, respecting our redemption in time. Yet these, he never did, either in the morning of time, or in any of its subsequent periods, "hide within his heart, or conceal from the "great congregation" of the Church. Even so early almost as the world itself existed, or man's misery was known, he, in the most public manner, in the first promise revealed them to the guilty progenitors of the human race. During the long period of the Mosaic dispensation, he made them known to his chosen people by the frequent messages of his ministering servants, which are collected in the Old Testament writings. During that space of time in which the Apostles of Christ lived on earth, he, in a still more open manner, proclaimed them to all the children of men, without distinction of nation, rank, character, or sex. He, in after times, by the ministrations of his slated servants, continued, still continues, and will continue, till time shall be no more, to publish them to all the ends of the earth, without any exception or limitation whatever.

whatever. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.—* All this he doth; according to his purpose from eternity, made known by his word in time. *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will*.* Let us remark,

In the second place, that they may be so called, because they declare God's method of reconciling sinners to himself. What way he would, in his infinite pleasure, have pursued for obtaining such a noble end, would, if he had not revealed himself in the sacred oracles, have remained to all the human race an impenetrable secret. But now, what that astonishing method is, the very design of the Scriptures which we have every day among our hands, is clearly to unfold. They, accordingly, in a great variety of different passages lay it in the clearest manner before the more illiterate and unintelligent of mankind; and still in a greater variety of them exhibit it in the most conspicuous point of view before the more penetrating and sagacious. They tell us, both more clearly and more obscurely, that, Jesus in his person as Mediator, in his righteousness as Surety, and in the influences of his Spirit which interest us in these unspeakable mercies, are the alone way by which

* Eph. i. 3, 4, 5.

we can ever again possess peace with him. *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation* *. *That Christ might reconcile both, Jews and Gentiles, unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: he came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh* †. *And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled* ‡. *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* §. Let us take notice,

In the third place, that they may be so called, because they intreat sinners to be reconciled to God. Whether he in the word of divine revelation either acts, or speaks in his own name; or whether he there commands any thing to be said, or done in his name; he does all to shew that he is earnestly intreating us to be at peace with him. Sometimes he confers gifts of different kinds. Often he sends messengers of different descriptions. At other times he speaks in languages and ways different, yet always, with the same design, does he all these things to us. For, never does he grant his eternal Son to redeem the members of his Church; his Holy

* 2 Cor. v. 19. † Eph. ii. 16, 17. ‡ Col. i. 20, 21. § Rom. v. 1.

Spirit to sanctify them; himself to be their portion; or his providential dispensations, along with his ordinances, to work out for them "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Never does he, in either of the two dispensations, appear in the form of a human person, delivering any message to the inhabitants of this world; send his well-beloved Son on our errand; angels on messages to us; or men, like ourselves, to be the messengers of his peace. Never does he speak, by the simple declarations of his grace; by the encouraging offers of his mercy; by the precious promises of his word; by the inviolable oaths sworn by his own perfections; by the fervent expostulations of his servants; nor, by the earnest intreaties of his ambassadors, but he aims at this very end. *Now will I sing to my well-beloved, a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes *?* Let us add,

IN the fourth place, that they may be so called, because when attended with the power of the Holy Ghost, they accomplish our reconcilia-

* Isa. v. 1, 2, 4.

tion to God. As God in all his works and ways discovers, on every occasion, an evident delight in variety; so doth he this, in the different ways by which he either reconciles sinners, or promotes the reconciliation of saints, to himself. Sometimes, as he did to Lydia, he makes use of his ordinances alone for converting sinners from the ways of sin, to the service of himself*. At other times, as he did to Cornelius and other gentile converts then under his roof, he employs these ordinances for the edifying of his people in holiness and comfort to everlasting salvation†. Many times, as he did to Manasseh, that wicked king, he honours the different dispensations of his providence, as the happy means of converting many‡. Often, as he did to Jehosaphat, that singularly pious prince, he makes these his providential dispensations, the favoured means of reaching edification to others§. Frequently, as he did to the famous Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul, he makes both his ordinances and his providences concur together for effectuating the conversion of his elect company||. Most commonly, as is known and felt in the experience of all the saints, he makes both these means, his ordinances and his providences, co-operate for the building up of his chosen members in every Christian grace, until they obtain the full possession of everlasting life in the heavenly country¶. But

* Acts xvi. 4. † Acts x. 44, 45. ‡ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12, 13.

§ 2 Chron. xvii. 5, 6. || Acts ix. 1—23.

¶ Rom. viii. 28. Psa. xxv. 10.

whatever are the external ways, by which he produces the conversion and edification of his select flock, we are bold, from Scripture and observation, to affirm that, he hath all along magnified the word of the Gospel above every other means, in accompanying it with the special influences of his Spirit, as the alone grand, external, and effectual instrument for beginning at first this good work in them on earth, for carrying it on from the smallest beginnings to the greatest height in this imperfect state, and for completing it in heaven for ever! *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes*.*

SUCH, Gospel-hearers, are the nature and tendency of these doctrines of the reconciliation; and so pleasing, suitable, and interesting are these topics of discourse which you have, every sabbath-day, in that place where you assemble to worship God, laid before you. High, in having access to hear them, are your privileges; and distinguished are your attainments. “Blessed
“are the eyes which see the things which ye
“see; and blessed are the ears which hear the
“things which ye hear. For I tell you that
“many kings, and prophets, and righteous men
“have desired to see those things which ye see,
“and have not seen them; and to hear those
“things which ye hear, and have not heard

* Psa. xix 7, 8.

“ them.” Possess then, at all times, a due esteem for those invaluable blessings which you at present enjoy; lest he should, in holy displeasure, say, “ I have called, and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hands, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distresses and anguish come upon you.” Improve these your invaluable mercies, that you may attain the enriching and blissful advantages manifested in them, all necessary grace in this world; and “ when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, a building of God, an house not made with hands,” which comprehends all possible glory, in the better country. *Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you*. Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober. Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him†.*

* John xii. 35.

† 1 Thess. v. 6, 8, 9, 12.

THE
MINISTRY
• F
RECONCILIATION.

SERMON II.

2 COR. V. 18.

—God—hath given to us the *ministry of reconciliation.*

IN the preceding discourse, I have given you a short account of the Ministry, and of the Ministry of Reconciliation, both of which are mentioned in the text. In this, I proceed to the

MANNER in which this Ministry, in all the periods of the New Testament Church, is handed down from one generation to another. *God gives to them this ministry of reconciliation.*

In the various periods of the New Testament Church, God hath, in different ways, given this ministry to his chosen servants. In that period, when Christ clothed in human nature, sojourned in this world, which was about the end of the

first dispensation of his grace and commencement of the second, he in his own person called the seventy disciples, and entrusted them with this ministry for a short space; and the apostles with it, for their lives. In the first age of Christianity, these apostles in concurrence with the whole Church collective where they then resided, selected and called faithful men; whom they entrusted with this ministry, and appointed to be evangelists and other office-bearers among her members, as were judged fit. In all the succeeding ages of the same dispensation, God employed, still does, and still will employ his ministers with his whole Church diffusive, wherever they are, to select and call faithful men to this work. *Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also* *. But as many profess to be entrusted with it in this manner, let us carefully and deliberately examine, what are the characteristics of that person to whom God hath given it, that we may be able, with clearness and certainty, to distinguish his faithful ministers from false pretenders.

I begin with observing, that God's giving this ministry to his servants supposes, that he, having in his eternal decree singled them out for this office, hath, in the course of his ordinary providence, conferred upon them a considerable share of natural talents. By natural talents, I

* 2 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

understand those various powers of mind and even of body, which the great author of every good and perfect gift bestows on his rational creatures of the human race, independent of any improvement they make in any possible form or period. Such powers, to a certain degree, are the gift of God to the whole human family. Some, it is true, possess a much larger share of them than others.

Every person, however, called by God to the work of this ministry will be endowed with a considerable share of them. Such a person only can evidence that God hath fitted him for the execution of the different branches of the sacred office; and that he hath called him to labour in his vineyard. Such a person only is capable of these necessary improvements which, it is supposed, he ought to make in knowledge of different kinds; can, with determined resolution and firmness, withstand that opposition, and frequent persecution to which he, in the performance of duty, is exposed; and can, in all rational probability, be fitted for profiting the immortal souls of men, and glorifying his great Creator and Redeemer.

In no age of the Church, accordingly, from the days of Adam to the days of John the evangelist, has God ever chosen one to be an office-bearer of this kind in his house, who was not furnished with all necessary qualifications for his work: not excepting even the famous son of the herdsman of Tekoa; nor the celebrated son of Jesse, who once followed the ewes with young.

Nay,

Nay, in no period of her existence from the beginning of the world to this very day, has God ever called one single person to this office, whom he did not fit with proper endowments for it. Nor, indeed, let me add, will he in any age yet to come ever call any individual to it who is not in such a manner thus qualified. How can it be that God should ever employ any of his ministering servants in his work, and yet send them a warfare upon their own charges? Is it possible, that he will in a little time come to call them to an account for certain talents, which he, in his parables, is represented as having given them; while he has never really conferred any upon them? How can he there be exhibited, as either graciously rewarding his diligent servants for occupying and improving these talents which he hath conferred on them, or strictly punishing his slothful servants for burying and misimproving them; while he hath really never given them any such which they might exercise? Can any person say that the bountiful Lord of heaven and earth ever in any way shewed himself to be "an hard or austere master" to any of his servants, "taking up what he laid not down, and reaping where he did not straw?"

IN the second place, God's giving this ministry includes his disposing the hearts of these persons, whom he has a mind to invest with it, in such a way, that sooner or later they are made to devote themselves to this office. Among the teachers of the Church, ever since she hath had an existence, there have always been a great number

number of his professing servants, whose hearts, whatever they may pretend, have at all times discovered an utter aversion from the sacred services of this holy office; while a vast number of them, on the other hand, have from the time they have seriously thought of it discovered a strong bent every way towards it. Never was this fact more strikingly exemplified than in the age in which we live. Wilfully blinded, indeed, is the man who does not see, that there are many of his pretended ministers though they profess an eager desire to employ their talents in the exercise of this sacred function, yet every day give lamentable evidence by their impious conduct, that their hearts are not at all thus disposed, that their minds are by no means set on being engaged in the noble exercises of it, and their desires are not in any degree to spend and be spent in the delightful employments of it. Such persons, wherever they be, evidently father themselves. They plainly tell all with whom they are conversant, that they are the profane and unfaithful posterity of Eli, part of whose curse it was, that they should "come
" and crouch for a piece of silver, and a morsel
" of bread, and should say, I pray thee, put me
" into one of the priests offices, that I may eat
" a piece of bread." Their conduct expressly declares to all, who have access to know them, that instead of being invested by God with this office, it must have been conferred upon them by the awful presumption of their profane companions, and wicked friends; and must have been accepted, not from a sincere desire to promote the grand ends of the Gospel, but from
the

the sordid and unworthy motives of indulging the strong corruption of their own hearts; the violent temptations of the evil one; and the unlawful love of their own gain.

Widely different, however, is the conduct of the intended servants of Jehovah; and very opposite is their character. Convinced of the arduous nature of the sacred office; and perceiving, even at a distance, the many inconveniences, hardships, dangers, and cruel persecutions attending the conscientious discharge of it; they consider it as too difficult for all human powers, and find themselves at first extremely averse to engage in the work. Their hearts in such a case, notwithstanding every carnal consideration which may be proposed, for some time remonstrate against it; and will not, for any thing that this world can offer, be brought, at all, to embark in it. Sensible, nevertheless, that their aversion to this work, when clearly convinced they are called to it, is their sin; persuaded that God has a right to demand their service, so long as they are dependent upon him; and remembering, at the same time, the strong obligations under which by God they have been laid to adhere in every case to their duty to him, and particularly when opposing their own carnal inclinations; they, in defiance of every difficulty which they ever apprehended, find themselves powerfully influenced and constrained to yield up themselves to it, in all the powers of their mind and members of their body; that their talents may be improved, their
duty

duty performed, their soul saved, the Church profited, and the divine perfections glorified.

With these sentiments, the conduct of Moses, Jeremiah, and others, prior to their being invested with the sacred office, when living in the private shade of obscurity, perfectly agrees. These illustrious characters did not rashly assume this office to themselves, neither did they ever discover any ardour to enter on the execution of it. Even, when they were unexpectedly called, and assured by their God of as much success as he would see necessary for profiting the precious souls of his Church, often did they rudely object to obey his condescending call, and long did they sinfully refuse to fulfil his heavenly mandate. Yet after all their unbecoming, and even unmanly opposition to these his plainest dictates, they found themselves thus strangely, though unavoidably compelled to dedicate themselves to this office, and they were evidently manifested to be the favourites of heaven in faithfully discharging it*.

IN the third place, God's giving to his chosen servants this ministry implies his furnishing them with such adventitious talents, as are necessary to qualify them, for the discharge of that important office to which he hath so disposed their hearts. The expression, adventitious talents, may, I apprehend, be used to signify these various acquisitions and improvements of any kind which our natural powers in the diligent

* Exod. iv. Jer. i.

use of the different means of meditation, reading, conversation, hearing, prayer, or otherwise may receive from God. All men have some measure or other of adventitious talents, as well as natural powers. These, marked out by God to the sacred office, have, in the use of these or similar appointed means, received from him a very considerable share of them; and generally too, in our age of the world, have in the use of such means acquired them by the most laborious and assiduous application.

Such a portion of them, is always as necessary, even as natural talents themselves for enabling them, in a becoming manner, to discharge the various duties of their ministry. Hereby alone they find their faculties gradually and sensibly enlarged; and their minds acquire as it were a form, capacity, and extent altogether new, and even formerly, to the persons themselves possessing them, totally unknown. They are made useful to that part of the Church among whom they labour; and to the whole Church of Christ at large. They are rendered ornamental to the glorious doctrines of the great God our Saviour; honouring to the sacred office with which they are invested; and glorifying to God himself.

Surrounding connections, spectators, and the world in general, in consequence of seeing them possess such distinguished endowments, which qualify them for this office, often ascribe the acquisition of them to their own attention and industry. But the persons themselves, who enjoy

joy them, impute it to the kindness of a gracious providence, who hath amply rewarded their diligent endeavours; and thereby furnished them with a considerable measure of human literature, divine knowledge, and all other necessary gifts for forwarding his own glorious purposes. *Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. And thou shalt speak unto Aaron the Levite, thy brother, and put words in his mouth; and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God. And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs *. But the Lord said unto Jeremiah, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out,*

* Exod. iv. 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17.

and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.*

IN the fourth place, God's giving to his designed servants this ministry comprehends his succeeding their aims at usefulness, as preachers among the real saints of God, with some measure of acceptableness and success. In the Church, in our own day as well as in any other period of her history, there will be found many professing pastors who have been differently favoured as to attainments for their office by the great Lord. Some there are, that give the most convincing evidence, that they have little or none of these attainments which fit them for the proper execution of its important duties. Others, although they discover some share of them, yet plainly evidence that they have not that measure requisite to prepare them for its difficult, though honourable services. A third set have, as far as men can judge, all necessary ability for it, yet in the sight of God, they want these internal qualities which are altogether essential to constitute them his ministering servants. Such false pretenders to this office, as compose these different classes of his professing ministers, notwithstanding their having common gifts of every kind, liberally bestowed upon them, far superior to many of the commissioned servants of Jehovah, and great interest among emperors, kings, princes, nobles, and other eminent men for patronizing them in the Church, may, though indeed God often makes such wicked

* Jer. i. 7, 8, 9, 10.

men to praise him and promote his interests, want many things necessary for rendering them approved among her members, and serviceable to them in their generations. Accordingly the Lord himself declares concerning such persons, *that he did not send them, yet they ran: that he did not speak to them, yet they prophesied: that they are among the prophets who do prophecy false dreams, and do tell them, and do cause the people to err by their lies, and by their lightness: that he sent them not, nor commanded them; that therefore they shall not profit this people at all* *.

Be the fate of these persons, and the issue of their ministrations, however, as it may, it is a fact clearly ascertained in Scripture, that all, whom God hath appointed to this office, shall have every accomplishment and qualification necessary for the faithful discharge of the important duties of it, both before God and man. They may not, it must be acknowledged, make an appearance adapted to the vitiated taste of the grandees of the earth; the erroneous of the age; the profane in any of the different ranks of society; or a great variety of other modern professors of religion among mankind; who too often, in every possible mode, discover themselves to be merely nominal Christians. Yet nevertheless, they shall make an appearance altogether suited to the uncorrupted taste of the excellent ones of the earth, who wait upon ordinances that they may receive new supplies of divine grace and strength for invigorating them

* Jer. xxiii. 21, 32.

in their Christian course ; and they shall be completely fitted for building them up in all the graces of the Holy Ghost to everlasting life. Nor is this all. The express word of divine grace assures them, that, in their ministerial character they shall have, a certain measure of acceptableness ; a public occasion of serving him ; many opportunities of doing good ; much success in discharging the various duties of their office among the members of the Church ; and moreover, every necessary accommodation of natural life while so engaged.

For the illustration of what I have said on this particular, the lives of the false and of the true prophets in Old Testament times may be presented to your view. The former of these, resembling false pretenders to the sacred office in New Testament times, were often for a short space very acceptable among the great and wicked of the earth, because of their smooth, agreeable, and deceitful doctrines ; but, at last, they were overtaken with eternal destruction, and often with temporal ruin as its unhappy prelude. The latter of them, resembling the faithful ministers in our own days, were so far from being acceptable among such hypocritical professors of that Church, because of their doctrines, that they were the very objects of their most inveterate malice and cruelest persecution ; but, notwithstanding, they were, as far as seemed meet to their master, received among the fearers of his name with every mark of cordial approbation and genuine success. Of this fact, the many pleasant promises of Old Testament
Scripture,

Scripture respecting, in the first step of their accomplishment, his antient Church, and in the succeeding steps of their fulfilment, this second dispensation of his grace, gave his appointed servants every possible assurance; while they tacitly and obliquely threatened judgments to false pretenders. *I will gather the remnant of my flock, out of all countries whither I have driven them, and I will bring them again to their folds, and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord*.* And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding †.

IN the fifth place, God's giving his destined servants this ministry includes his presenting them with the regular call of the Church to the exercise of it. How such a call is conducted, let me, as you have access many ways to know something of its nature, put you in remembrance only of a few important circumstances relative to it. It may be described, that act of the whole congregation of professing Christian members in full communion with the Church, by which, they choose a pastor whom they know, have tried, and have found properly qualified with respect to capacity, piety, and prudence, for discharging all the duties of the ministerial office to their edification; and invite him; and intreat him, as the man of Macedo-

* Jer. xxiii. 3, 4.

† Jer. iii. 15.

nia of old did in a vision to Paul, to come and help their spiritual interests in the important services of this ministry. Considering that this is a matter in which the unperishable souls of all the congregation are deeply concerned, it ought always to be performed, when the whole body of professing Christians interested are present; and every one of them ought cheerfully to join in that solemn action with all possible unanimity, or at least with all possible harmony. According to the divine appointment, one of the ministers of the reconciliation from an adjoining part of the Church should always be present, prior to their entering upon it, that he being their mouth may supplicate the divine presence and direction, as their happy privilege when employed in it; and may call them now about to be thus occupied, to a lively faith in the great Lord of the harvest, that so, on this occasion, they may be enabled to perform their duty aright. Thus managing this business, God himself will become the overseer and conductor of the whole transaction; and all that they perform in it, shall by consequence prosper well.

Such, indeed, in its nature and consequences, will be the public call of the Church to that person whom God invests with this ministry.—For none have ever yet been entrusted with it, that have not had such a call; nor can any, in truth, whatever they may profess, ever be said to have it given them, unless they have, in this manner, received it. They may not, it must be confessed, have obtained it from this, or that part of the Church, which is most agree-
able

able to themselves; or in this, or that part of their lives, when it might, in their apprehension, have been more convenient for them. Yet still, they shall have it from the Church, whenever the time and place appointed for them, can properly admit them, in their public character, to the exercise of this ministry.

Thus Matthias was, in the first age of the Christian Church, according to the received opinion, chosen by her members, when thus assembled, to exercise the office of apostleship along with the eleven apostles *. Thus Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas were, in the same age of the New Testament Church, chosen by the Jewish Christians to exercise the office of deaconship among them at Jerusalem †. Thus Christ has appointed, that his ministering servants of every station, in all the periods of this last dispensation, shall be chosen to discharge these offices. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door, is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved ‡.* Though these words were applied by Christ himself to the scribes and Pharisees of his own times, yet, we apprehend, they are appli-

* Acts i. 12—26. See Beza, Grotius, Guyse, and others on this passage.

† Acts vi. 1—7.

‡ John x. 1, 2, 3, 9.

cable to all those false teachers, who, in every age, succeed them in their formal and dissembling practices. " Now all these things happened unto us for examples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

IN the last place, God's giving this ministry contains his bestowing upon his servants a Scriptural ordination to the exercise of it. What such an ordination is, the Bible clearly states; and the standards of the Church of Scotland, with which, next to your Bibles, I hope, every presbyterian among you is familiar, plainly and compendiously delineate in all its solemnity and significancy. Let it suffice for me therefore, at present, to say only, that it is just the setting apart of a person, endowed with all necessary spiritual gifts, and called, according to the word of God, in the most solemn and public manner, to be an office-bearer in the house of God; setting him apart, I say, by prayer, fasting, the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, and solemn commendation of him to God.

These external forms, used by the command of Christ, may be considered, as significant of the serious nature of it; the spirituality of these invaluable blessings which, often along with it, have been communicated to the person so ordained; the manner in which they are conveyed;

ed ; that devotedness to the service of God which he should possess, and evidence ; and that entire seclusion from the things of the world, which is ever supposed to belong to him. When they are viewed, as significant of these things, they will be found worthy of that solemn ordinance about which they are conversant ; worthy of our chearful compliance with them ; worthy of our keenest support at all times ; and even worthy of God to institute, for such an occasion, in his Church. Very plainly is subjection to this ordinance enjoined upon the ministers of his house ; and the nature of it suggested in many passages of his word. *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers ; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away*.* When they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed†. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands‡. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery§.

* Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3.

† Acts xiv. 23.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 6.

§ 1 Tim. iv. 14.

When God gives this qualification of his ministers with those other qualifications already mentioned, he may, with justice and propriety, be said to give his chosen servants the ministry of reconciliation. For this is the crowning part of the character of such a minister; and it is the finishing stroke of the portrait of one who, in the eye of God, is invested with the office of an ambassador of Christ; in which he acts, as though God did beseech sinners by him to be reconciled to God.

FROM the view which the text has led us to take of this subject, we may learn many instructions relating to life and practice. We are plainly taught, that the message which the ministers of Christ deliver, contains very joyful tidings. It brings the best news that ever could have reached our world. It publishes not that God is by the death of Christ made placable or reconcileable only to sinful men, but that his wrath is actually appeased, his anger turned away, his seemingly discordant perfections fully harmonized, himself reconciled, and reconciling the world to himself. What better news could descend from heaven to earth? These, truly, are more important than if we were assured, the world had fallen to us by heritage; and far more joyful than if we heard, we were constituted the lords of the universe. *Behold*, said the angelic messenger who was no ways interested in them, farther than as they brought glory to his great Creator, and salvation to perishing men, his fellow-creatures, *I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*
For

For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men.* O Lord, I will praise thee, sings the Church who were in the highest degree concerned in these tidings in strains, if possible, still more elevated, *though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength, and my song, he also is become my salvation†.*

FROM this discourse, we are farther taught, that the office of the ministry is a very laborious employment. The ministers of Christ have very much work assigned them every where throughout his word. So much, in fact, that the discharge of the various duties of their office will engross the whole of their time. Constantly aiming at the performance of them in their season, they will find few vacant hours from the exercise of this ministry; little time to squander away even in innocent pleasures or amusements; far less to misimproye in dissipation or trivial engagements; none at all, to mispend in rioting and banquetings; which, alas! have too often occasioned much just reproach to many professed ministers. Besides, such employments, how much soever they may occupy the time and attention of false pretenders to this office, will never tend to secure the satisfaction, serenity, peace, and joy of their own minds;

* Luke ii. 10, 11, 14. † Isa. xii. 1, 2.

obtain the approbation of their judge before his awful tribunal; ensure to them the comfortable sentence of the faithful servant; profit the souls of men; or obey the divine laws. Firmly persuaded of this, they always study to reduce the whole duties of their office to practice; they employ themselves, from day to day, in the peculiar business of it; they assiduously endeavour to approve themselves to God, "workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, and giving to every one his portion of meat in due season;" and with a persevering diligence they are never satisfied, until they have done all without reserve that Christ in his word hath enjoined. *I charge thee*, said one minister of Christ to another, who was his son both in the Lord, and in this ministry, *before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry* *.

THIS discourse should, in the next place, inspire believers with gratitude to the three persons of the Godhead, for what they have done in reconciling rebellious sinners to themselves. To each of these persons we are in an especial and infinite manner indebted. To the Almighty Father, who from eternity decreed the redemption of captive sinners; who, in the fulness

* 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 5.

of time, sent the Son to execute the divine purpose; and who, in conjunction with his well-beloved Son, sends the Holy Ghost, in every period of time, to make effectual application of it to the hearts of obstinate men. To the eternal Son, who, when we were in a state of rebellion against this adorable three-one God, reconciled us to them by his own blood; who, in concert with the Father, sends the divine Spirit on the above designs; and who by him has, in every age, employed his ministering servants to proclaim an open indemnity in the gospel for our long course of treasonable conduct carried on against him. To the ever blessed Spirit, who, by accompanying the gospel with his powerful influences, subdues our stubborn hearts to himself; who helps forward this work of reconciliation in them from time to time; and who will perfect it in heaven through eternity. *O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!*. Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings†.*

Let an abiding impression of such infinite goodness manifested to our fallen race, at all times, remain upon our spirits. Let the warmest gratitude for the unnumbered acts of the goodness of the Trinity glow in your hearts, and discover

* Psa. xxxi. 19.

† Psa xxxvi. 5, 7.

itself in your conversations. Can you ever indulge the thought of possessing delicacy, sensibility, generosity, and gratitude, if you forget the infinite God, that is your Saviour and your all. Forget, Christians, the ever blessed Saviour, who hath done, is doing, and will do such great things for you! Whom shall you, or whom can you remember, if you are capable of forgetting him? Him, to whom you are indebted for life; its enjoyments; its comforts; and its prolongation. Him, to whom you owe the pardon of sin; acceptance into the divine favour; adoption into the family of heaven; and holiness in nature and life. He hath given you a sure establishment in a gracious state; the comforts of the divine salvation, which are altogether unspeakable; an assurance of a complete triumph over death, as well as every other enemy; and a glorious hope of a blessed immortality. He hath assured you, that your spirits shall have a welcome reception into the heavenly mansions; that your bodies shall have a glorious resurrection to eternal life; that your persons shall have a joyful appearance before the judgment-seat; and that a delightful sentence shall be there pronounced in your favour. By him the heavenly city where your lodging shall for ever be, will be pointed out; the gates of the new Jerusalem set open; the path of life shewn; and an entrance, with gladness and rejoicing, into the palace of the Almighty King granted. By him you shall be brought to the possession of that kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; placed in the light of Jehovah's countenance; caused to share

share of that fulness of joy, which is in his presence; and made to drink of these rivers of pleasures, which are at his right hand. From him is the crown of life, that shall be put upon your head; the royal robes, with which in the heavenly city you shall be arrayed; the glorious throne, on which you shall be seated; and the heavenly city, where you shall dwell for ever.

THE consideration of the whole subject should teach every one of you how to live, at all times, in this world. Very nearly connected is your duty with these precious doctrines of the reconciliation which you have always access to hear; and the more, in truth, you regard them in thought, word, and deed, the more you perform it. Study therefore to be much acquainted with them. Welcome them, whenever you hear them, exclaiming, "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners: of whom I am chief." Live continually in the faith of them. Rejoice always in the consolations which they afford. Be on all occasions ready to shew your concern in these glorious truths, and adherence to them. Esteem the ministers of the reconciliation, as the alone servants of the living God, who point out to you the way of salvation. Connect yourselves with them in the fellowship of the gospel. Let fervent prayer to God, for their happiness, and the success of their ministrations among you, be your daily exercise. Let prudent information, from time to time, of their success among you be given them. Let their instructions be listened

to by you with the greatest attention. Let their exhortations and examples be remembered by you, and followed with all readiness. Let it be your constant endeavour to profit by their labours and ministrations. Let every thing to encourage, assist, and co-operate with them in the work of the ministry be performed by you in your stations. *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines: for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly*.*

Instructed, directed, and animated by the daily ministrations of such teachers, let all of you, my dear fellow Christians, continually keep in mind that whatever you have, are, or do expect, comes from God, who reconciles you to himself by Jesus Christ; and who hath, for your behoof, given to his chosen servants this ministry; and let every one of you, under the powerful influence of this belief, comply with all the words, ordinances, and institutions of Christ; deriving di-

* Heb. xiii. 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18.

vine influences and strength from him, in every case, for adhering to them; "earnestly contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints: neither turning to the right hand nor to the left." Happy they, who thus uniformly and constantly make progress in their course to the heavenly country. They are already, "according to his abundant mercy, begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; to an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them;" and they shall, in due time "have an entrance ministered unto them abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts, in your ignorance; but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy* *. *Wherefore, seeing ye are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset you; and run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God* †.

* 1 Pet. i. 13, 14, 15, 16.

† Heb. xii. 1, 2.

